

Book Review / Recension

Lori Friesen. (2008). *The Beginning Teacher's Handbook for Elementary School*. Calgary, AB: Detselig Enterprises Ltd. 101 (plus 100 pages in the Appendix). ISBN 978-1-55059-352-5

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As an emerging elementary teacher, I was happy to discover *The Beginning Teacher's Handbook for Elementary School* by Lori Friesen. It is a very practical guide for teachers who are starting in their first classroom. In her introduction, Friesen provides documented evidence from research studies that first-year teachers face a variety of problems, including evaluation of curriculum materials, organization of class work, individual student concerns, inclusion and special needs, with the "number one problem for first-year teachers [being] classroom management and discipline" (p.10). It is Friesen's hope that this resource will provide the beginning teacher with the support need to make the first year positive and fulfilling.

The Beginning Teacher's Handbook for Elementary School is divided into nine chapters that focus on, respectively, the preparation for the school year, the first day of school, getting-to-know-you activities, general classroom management, student motivation, assessment, establishing positive parent relationships, survival ("tips for preventing stress"), and making a successful and effective conclusion to the school year. There is also a comprehensive appendix that includes over seventy templates and sample activities that Friesen has used in her classroom, as well as a CD from which all documents found in the appendix can be printed.

The first three chapters focus on preparation and the first few days of school. Chapter 1, *The Countdown Begins!*, comprises five checklists of “to-do’s before school starts”: instructional supplies; classroom environment (including desk and furniture arrangement, general classroom organization and bulletin boards); suggestions on methods of meeting the students prior to the first day, getting to know the staff, such as other teachers, potential mentors, educational assistants, and grade level or school specialists; and, the school policies and procedures (for example, “Which curriculum resources are available for my use?” and “What is the fire drill procedure?”). Chapter 2, *The First Day of School!*, offers tips on class rules and the start of classroom routines, from “How to enter a classroom” to “End of the day duties.” Chapter 3, *Fun Getting-To-Know-You Activities!*, includes a number of activities that can be used to begin the first week of school.

Chapters 4 through 6 deal with in-class issues. Chapter 4, *General Classroom Management* provides “tips to ensure success”: effective manage time, various types of planning, planning for substitute teachers, consequences for the rules not being followed, and rewarding positive behaviour. Chapter 5, *Student Motivation*, discusses intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, “games that motivate and inspire,” effective verbal praise, and various strategies including behavioural, attention-deficit, reading, writing, and mathematics. Chapter 6, *Assessment*, offers “some general tips to get you started” before mentioning the three types of evaluation and the use of rubrics as an assessment tool.

The remaining three chapters focus on effective communication with parents, the teacher’s “survival” and finishing out the year on a positive note. Chapter 7, *Establishing Positive Parent Relationships*, offers checklists for meeting the teacher night or an open house, maintaining positive relationships throughout the year, and conducting parent-teacher conferences. Chapter 8, *Survival*, has suggestions for preventing stress. Chapter 9, *A Fantastic Finish!*, includes some of the author’s favourite end-of-year activities, such as “Letters to next year’s class” and “Class year-books.”

Each chapter is laid out to be easily accessed for a reference or an idea. Very useful lists are included throughout the book, such as “checklists of to-do’s before school starts”; a practical discussion on classroom

routines (p. 28); over twenty-five “fun getting-to-know-you activities” to begin the first week of school which are divided into appropriate grade levels with the note that “many of the activities can be modified for different age levels (p. 37); “tips to ensure success” with classroom management (p. 47); planning tips – both “short term (weekly/monthly) and long term (yearly)” (p. 50) – and a list of over forty teaching strategies (p. 52); promotion of “students’ intrinsic interests in your class” (p. 62); a comprehensive list of various evaluation strategies and the use of rubrics (p. 77); suggestions on how to establish “positive parent relationships” (p. 79); “tips for preventing stress” (p. 89) which is important for every teacher but especially to beginning teachers; and “A fantastic finish!” with a note that “June can be a challenging month” and how to make “the last month of school memorable” (p. 93).

The Appendix is an excellent resource for activity ideas and possible templates. These relate to the various activities discussed in the chapters with highly practical applications, including sample letters to parents, getting-to-know-you activities, various “templates/activities for classroom management” such as “substitute teacher folder”, “year plan template”, and several student awards and certificates. There are also useful templates for the “end of year activities.” The included CD is also a very useful addition to this book because it allows for easy reproduction of full-sized colour copies of all documents found in the appendix.

As a new teacher, I find the first four chapters to be particularly useful: “Checklists of to-do’s before school starts”, “The First Day of School”, “Getting-To-Know-You Activities” and “General Classroom Management.” Education programs do not always provide these kinds of strategies and I am sure I will find it helpful when I begin to prepare and manage my own classroom.

The Beginning Teacher’s Handbook for Elementary School appears to be an incredibly useful resource for new elementary teachers and includes practical, easy-to-reference information for those teachers who are just starting their career. The advice provided throughout this book makes it an ideal tool for beginning teachers.